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IN THE U.S. PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE BEFORE
THE BOARD OF PATENT APPEALS AND INTERFERENCES

In re application of	Appeal No.
Christophe BERTEZ et al.	Conf. 6760
Application No. 09/755,053	Group 1725
Filed January 8, 2001	Examiner J. Johnson

METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR THE LASER
CUTTING OF STAINLESS STEEL, COATED
STEEL, ALUMINUM OR ALUMINUM ALLOYS
WITH A BIFOCAL OPTICAL COMPONENT

APPEAL BRIEF

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR HONORS:

May 24, 2004

1. **Real Party in Interest**

The real party in interest in the present application and appeal is the assignee, L'Air Liquide (a French societe anonyme).

2. **Related Appeals and Interferences**

Neither appellants, the appellants' legal representative, nor assignee is aware of any other appeals or interferences that will directly affect or be directly affected by or have a bearing on the Board's decision in the present appeal.

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3. Status of Claims

Claims 1, 2, 5-8, 11, 12, 14, 15, and 22-30 are rejected under 35 USC §103(a) as unpatentable over NIELSEN (6,175,096) in view of ROLF et al. (WO 96/23624).

Claim 9 is rejected under 35 USC §103(a) as unpatentable over NIELSEN in view of ROLF et al., and further in view of MCNEILL (4,781,907).

Claims 3, 4, 10, 13, and 16-21 have been cancelled by way of prior amendment.

4. Status of Amendments

Appellants have filed no amendment subsequent to the final rejection of October 22, 2003. Appellants have, however, made of record two separate declarations under 37 CFR §1.132 subsequent to such final rejection.

5. Summary of Invention

The invention defined by the present claims is a method of cutting a workpiece made of stainless steel, coated steel, aluminum or aluminum alloy. Page 1, lines 1-8. The method uses a laser beam as the cutting tool. Id.

The laser reaches the workpiece via one or more transparent or reflecting optical elements, such as lenses or mirrors. Page 3, lines 21-31; element 1 in Figure 1. The optical elements are configured such that the laser has at least two focusing points. Id.; Figure 1, elements PF1 and PF2. The

cutting tool utilizes an oxygen/nitrogen assist gas supplied to the cutting region. Id.

6. Issues

The issues presented for review are:

whether claims 1, 2, 5-8, 11, 12, 14, 15, and 22-30 are obvious over NIELSEN (6,175,096) in view of ROLF et al. (WO 96/23624); and

whether claim 9 is obvious over the same combination of references and further in view of McNeill (4,781,907).

7. Grouping of the Claims

For each ground of rejection, the claims stand or fall together.

8. Arguments

Claims 1, 2, 5-8, 11, 12, 14, 15, and 22-30 stand rejected under 35 USC §103(a) as being unpatentable over NIELSEN in view of ROLF et al. Appellants respectfully request that such rejection be reversed for at least the following reasons:

Of the rejected claims, claims 1 and 22 are independent. Each is a method claim directed to a method for cutting a workpiece made of stainless steel, coated steel, aluminum, or aluminum alloy. Each recites the steps of: providing at least one transparent or reflecting optical means for focusing at least one laser beam, comprising a nozzle;

providing at least one assist gas to the nozzle under pressure; and cutting the workpiece with the laser beam. Each of the independent claims also requires the optical means to be of the multifocus type, and the assist gas to be an oxygen/nitrogen mixture. The two claims differ in substance with respect to the composition of the oxygen/nitrogen mixture.

In the paragraph beginning on page 2, line 15 of the present specification a originally filed, the inventors define a multifocus laser:

In the case of the present invention, the expression "optical means of the multifocus type" is understood to mean that the optical means, for example a lens, makes it possible to focus the laser beam at several focusing points separated from one another, usually a first and a second separate focusing points, which points generally lie on an axis approximately coaxial with the axis of the nozzle of the laser device, that is to say of the laser head from which the laser beam or beams emanate.

Claim 1 recites that the assist gas contains at least 90% nitrogen, and no gas other than the assist gas is supplied to the nozzle. Claim 22 requires that the assist gas has an oxygen content greater than 0% by volume and less than 8% by volume, the rest being nitrogen, and no gas other than the assist gas is supplied to the nozzle.

The primary NIELSEN '096 reference is offered for its asserted teaching or suggestion of a method of cutting a workpiece made of stainless steel by the use of at least one transparent or reflecting optical means for focusing at least one

laser beam, in which the optical means is the multifocus type. The NIELSEN '096 reference is also offered for teaching the use of an assist gas using nitrogen.

As freely acknowledged by the Examiner, the NIELSEN '096 reference does not teach an assist gas with a nitrogen/oxygen mixture. It is this feature for which the secondary ROLF et al. reference is offered. The ROLF et al. reference describes a laser beam steel cutting method utilizing an assist gas having a nitrogen/oxygen mixture.

Appellants respectfully suggest that the assertion in the Official Action that the combination of NIELSEN '096 and WO 96/23624 render obvious the claimed invention is clearly based on hindsight. Indeed, as readily acknowledged in the Official Action, NIELSEN '096 is silent on the subject of using a gas mixture for cutting stainless steel and the other materials. As explicitly taught by NIELSEN '096, only pure gases can be used for cutting ordinary steel (specifically, oxygen) and stainless steel (specifically, nitrogen) when using a multiple focus lens (see column 2, lines 53-56).

ROLF et al. teach the use of nitrogen/oxygen mixtures for laser cutting stainless steels or other steels, and aluminum and its alloys, but only when cutting with a single focus lens, not a multifocus lens.

However, as explained in the specification of the present invention (see, e.g., page 1, lines 30-39 to page 2,

lines 1-5; page 4, lines 30-34; and page 5, lines 7-24), the improvement sought to be achieved with respect to the existing laser cutting processes using either a single focus lens, such as that of ROLF et al., or a multiple focus lens, such as that of NIELSEN '096, was to further improve the cutting speed, and the gas consumption, without any negative impact on the cut quality.

This problem was solved by the inventors of the present invention by combining, in a novel and nonobvious manner, a multiple focus objective in combination with a particular gas mixture (O_2/N_2) with the aim of cutting particular materials.

Such a combination has never been attempted prior to the present invention, due at least in part to the fact that a skilled artisan would have no motivation whatsoever to combine the teachings of the ROLF et al. and NIELSEN '096 references precisely because they deal with alternative technologies. Specifically, NIELSEN '096 teaches how to improve the cutting speed and gas consumption using a multiple focus lens as opposed to a single focus lens process, whereas ROLF et al. teach how to improve the cutting speed and gas consumption, using a N_2/O_2 gas mixture, as opposed to pure gas, but only in the context of a single focus lens process.

Furthermore, NIELSEN '096 clearly teaches that, when using a multiple focus lens, only pure gases should be used. Accordingly, this teaches directly away from the present invention as claimed. Were one to start from the perspective of

the combination of the references and end up at the present invention, it would be necessary to pursue a path that runs entirely contrary to the teachings of NIELSEN '096.

It is instructive in this regard to consider the references cited during prosecution of the ROLF et al. patent itself. One of these is U.S. patent 4,724,297 naming as sole inventor S.E. NIELSEN, the same sole inventor named in the primary applied reference. A copy of the NIELSEN '297 patent is included herewith and incorporated herein by reference.

When considering the teachings of NIELSEN '297, it becomes clear that NIELSEN first developed no later than June 1986 (the priority filing date of NIELSEN '297) a laser cutting process of high alloys or stainless steel using a gas mixture containing O₂ and an inert gas such as nitrogen, resulting in a high cutting speed and no burr. Specifically, NIELSEN '297 refers to the use of a nitrogen/oxygen mixture as assist gas in at least: the abstract; column 2, lines 19-29 and 45-53; column 3, lines 1-14 and 27-32; and column 4, lines 21-27.

In September 1996, more than one full decade later, Nielsen filed the first Danish application whose priority is claimed by the applied NIELSEN '096 patent, disclosing and claiming his second, multifocus process. In connection with such, he did not disclose or suggest that N₂/O₂ mixtures can be used with a multiple focus lens in order to further improve the cutting process, gas consumption, and quality of the cut.

Additionally, in column 1, lines 14-26 of the NIELSEN '096 patent, Mr. Nielsen notes, with respect to German patent 2,713,904, that multifocus laser cutting was known. The German patent in question was published October 5, 1978. A copy of such German reference is enclosed.

Despite the fact that Mr. Nielsen was perfectly aware that gas mixtures can be useful in certain circumstances to improve the cutting speed and the cut quality), he did not contemplate using such in the context of NIELSEN '096 and, in contrast, advocated in NIELSEN '096 to use pure gases in combination with a multiple focus lens.

We therefore know from the teachings of the prior art itself that the sole inventor named in the primary reference: 1) was aware of the use of the use of multifocus lasers in cutting tools no later than September 30, 1996 (the earliest priority filing date of the applied '096 reference) and acknowledged that multifocus laser cutting was known since at least 1978 (publication date of the German patent); was aware of the use of a nitrogen/oxygen mixture as an assist gas no later than June 10, 1986 (the filing date of the NIELSEN '297 patent); and specifically taught the use of pure gases with a multifocus laser cutting process in 1996, despite being aware of the characteristics of assist gas mixtures for over ten years.

Please note that appellants made of record through the response filed March 22, 2004 a declaration under Rule 132 by

Erik Nielsen, the sole inventor named in the primary NIELSEN '096 patent and the earlier NIELSEN '297 patent. It is noteworthy that the inventor named in an applied reference is making a formal statement on the record as to the insufficiency of his own patent, combined with a secondary reference, to render obvious the claims of the present application. As Mr. Nielsen points out in his declaration, he has no personal interest in the present application, but was so moved by what he considered to be the inequity in the rejection based on his patent that he willingly executed the declaration that is now of record.

As Mr. Nielsen points out in his declaration, when he was performing the research that underlies the invention disclosed and recited in NIELSEN '096, he was working with the Dual Focus (DF) technique, but only in combination with pure gases. He states further that when he was performing the research underlying the NIELSEN patent method, he knew that combined nitrogen/oxygen mixtures were being used for the laser cutting of stainless steels, aluminum, or similar materials, but only in connection with a mono-focal lens. Significantly, he states that in spite of that knowledge (as one of skill in the art) of the use of nitrogen/oxygen mixtures, he never considered using mixed gasses in connection with the DF technique. Accordingly, the declarant, as one of skill in the art, was clearly aware of the multi-focus technique upon which he was performing research, as well as the use of mixtures of nitrogen

and oxygen in connection with a mono-focal technique, but was not persuaded as one of skill in the art to combine the two to use the recited nitrogen/oxygen mixture with a DF laser cutting technique.

Appellants suggest that the facts surrounding the development of laser cutting, as clearly evidenced by at least the two NIELSEN patents and the Nielsen declaration, provides a highly significant framework for consideration of the question of obviousness. As the Supreme Court stated:

While the ultimate question of patent validity is one of law, the § 103 condition, which is but one of three conditions, each of which must be satisfied, lends itself to several basic factual inquiries. Under § 103, the scope and content of the prior art are to be determined; differences between the prior art and the claims at issue are to be ascertained; and the level of ordinary skill in the pertinent art resolved. Against this background, the obviousness or nonobviousness of the subject matter is determined. Such secondary considerations as commercial success, long felt but unsolved needs, failure of others, etc., might be utilized to give light to the circumstances surrounding the origin of the subject matter sought to be patented. As indicia of obviousness or nonobviousness, these inquiries may have relevancy. Graham v. John Deere Co. of Kansas City, 86 S.Ct. 684, 694 (1966) (citations omitted).

In the same case, the Court also stated:

And, further, that the long-felt need in the industry for a device such as [the inventor's] together with its wide commercial success supports its patentability. These legal inferences or subtests do focus attention on economic and motivational rather than technical issues and are, therefore, more susceptible of judicial treatment than are the highly technical facts often present in patent litigation. Such inquiries may lend a helping hand to the judiciary which, as Mr. Justice Frankfurter observed, is most ill-fitted to discharge the technological

duties cast upon it by patent legislation. They may also serve to 'guard against slipping into use of hindsight,' and to resist the temptation to read into the prior art the teachings of the invention in issue. Id. at 703 (citations omitted).

Appellants suggest that it is precisely this "temptation to read into the prior art the teachings of the invention in issue" that underlies the present rejection. In effort to avoid such pitfall, the Federal Circuit has noted that "evidence of secondary considerations may often be the most probative and cogent evidence in the record. It may often establish that an invention appearing to have been obvious in light of the prior art was not." Stratoflex, Inc. v. Aeroquip Corp., 713 F.2d 1530, 1538 (Fed. Cir. 1983).

As is well illustrated by the facts of the present invention, there has existed a longstanding and continuous improvement in the quality of laser cutting, and both oxygen/nitrogen assist gas mixtures and multifocus laser cutting have been known for many years, without ever having been combined until the present inventors did so.

Appellants suggest that there may be no better surrogate for the fictitious "one having skill in the art" than Mr. Nielsen. As the sole inventor named by each of two U.S. patents disclosing and claiming developments in laser cutting of metals, he clearly is of sufficient technical prowess to meet the necessary skill requirement. As one actively contributing to both the multifocus facet and mixed assist gas facet of the art,

he uniquely provides the perspective of one having skill particularly directed to these two elements recited in each of the independent claims.

From both the two NIELSEN patents and Mr. Nielsen's declaration, we know that he developed a single-focus laser cutting technique using a nitrogen/oxygen gas mixture no later than 1986. We also know that he developed a multifocus laser cutting technique using a pure assist gas no later than 1996. We also know from the German patent 2,713,904 cited by NIELSEN '096 that multifocus laser cutting was known in the art at least as early as 1978. In his current declaration, we know that, until learning of the activities of the present inventors, he did not consider combining a nitrogen/oxygen assist gas with a multifocus laser cutting technique.

That the present method as claimed constitutes an improvement over the art is a fact known from the present application. That Mr. Nielsen is one of skill in the art is known from his two patents, as is the fact of his particular knowledge of multifocus/single focus applications and pure/mixed assist gas applications. That he never considered combining a mixed nitrogen/oxygen assist gas with a multifocus laser is known implicitly from his second, '096 patent, and explicitly from his declaration. That a span of more than ten years separates Mr. Nielsen's disclosure of mixed assist gases and multifocus lasers is known from the filing dates of his two patents. That there

appears to exist no evidence of any real person of skill in the art who considered combining the two features in question is implicit in the absence of art supporting an anticipation rejection. That the only teaching of such combination is described in the present application is implied by the same absence.

As is clear from the totality of the evidence, both multifocus laser cutting and oxygen/nitrogen mixed assist gas for laser cutting have been known in the art for many, many years. As experts in the field have not seen fit to combine these two features until the present inventors did, hindsight perspective is the only way to reach a conclusion of obviousness.

Appellants have also made of record a second declaration, this one executed by Olivier MATILE, one of the named inventors in the present invention. The substance of this declaration includes the points made by Mr. Nielsen in his declaration, and furthermore points out the unexpected nature of the results that came from combining a Dual Focus laser cutting technique with a nitrogen/oxygen mixture, as recited in the present claims. Mr. Matile also points out in his declaration that the cutting properties of a multifocus lens are very different from those of the mono-focal type, particularly due to the repartition of energy in the thickness to be cut, which is different between the two approaches. Mr. Matile also points out in additional detail why the nature of multifocus and single

focus lenses are of sufficient difference that one of skill in the art would not be motivated to combine the gas mixture always used in the prior art in connection with a mono-focal lens with a multifocus laser cutting device.

Accordingly, the results reached by the present inventors using the disclosed technique are clearly unexpected, also supporting a reversal of the present rejection.

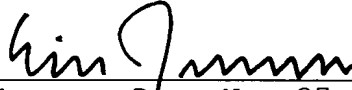
The second issue under consideration is the rejection of claim 9 under 35 USC §103(a) as unpatentable over the combination of references considered above, and further in view of MCNEILL. The MCNEILL reference is offered merely for its asserted teaching or suggestion of obtaining a nitrogen/oxygen mixture by treating air with a membrane system.

Irrespective of the ability of the MCNEILL reference to teach or suggest that for which it is offered, it nevertheless relies upon the combination of references considered in the first rejection for teaching the combination of a multifocus laser and an oxygen/nitrogen assist gas mixture in a metal cutting application. Accordingly, appellants respectfully suggest that the overall combination no more renders claim 9 *prima facie* obvious than does the NIELSEN/ROLF combination as to the claims

considered above. Reversal of this rejection is therefore also respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,

YOUNG & THOMPSON

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Eric Jensen", is written over a horizontal line.

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9. **Appendix**

1. A method of cutting the workpiece made of stainless steel, coated steel, aluminum or aluminum alloy, comprising the steps of:

providing at least one transparent or reflecting optical means for focusing at least one laser beam, comprising a nozzle;

providing at least one assist gas to the nozzle under pressure; and

cutting the workpiece with the laser beam;

wherein the optical means is of the multifocus type, the assist gas is an oxygen/nitrogen mixture containing at least 90% nitrogen, and no gas other than the assist gas is supplied to the nozzle.

2. The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the multifocus optical means is chosen from lenses, mirrors and combinations thereof.

5. The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the assist gas is a nitrogen/oxygen mixture having an oxygen content greater than 0% by volume and less than 8% by volume, the rest being nitrogen.

6. The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the optical means is arranged so as to obtain at least one first focusing point positioned near the upper surface of the workpiece to be cut, or in the thickness of the workpiece to be cut in a

region close to said upper surface, and at least one second focusing point positioned near the lower surface of the workpiece to be cut and in the thickness of the latter, or beyond the latter.

7. The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the thickness of the workpiece to be cut is between 1.5 mm and 5 mm.

8. The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the workpiece to be cut is chosen from plates, sheets and tubes.

9. The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the nitrogen/oxygen mixture is obtained directly on the site of use from atmospheric air treated by a membrane system.

11. The method of claim 2, wherein the multifocus optical means comprises a bifocal lens.

12. The method of claim 1, wherein the assist gas is an oxygen/nitrogen mixture containing from 92 to 98% nitrogen.

14. The method as claimed in claim 5, wherein the assist gas is a nitrogen/oxygen mixture having an oxygen content between 150 ppm by volume and 5% by volume, the rest being nitrogen.

15. The method as claimed in claim 6, wherein the first focusing point positioned so as to coincide with said upper surface.

22. A method of cutting the workpiece made of stainless steel, coated steel, aluminum or aluminum alloy, comprising the steps of:

providing at least one transparent or reflecting optical means for focusing at least one laser beam, comprising a nozzle;

providing at least one assist gas to the nozzle under pressure; and

cutting the workpiece with the laser beam;

wherein the optical means is of the multifocus type, the assist gas is an oxygen/nitrogen mixture having an oxygen content greater than 0% by volume and less than 8% by volume, the rest being nitrogen, and no gas other than the assist gas is supplied to the nozzle.

23. The method as claimed in claim 22, wherein the multifocus optical means is chosen from lenses, mirrors and combinations thereof.

24. The method of claim 23, wherein the multifocus optical means comprises a bifocal lens.

25. The method as claimed in claim 22, wherein the assist gas is an oxygen/nitrogen mixture containing at least 90% nitrogen.

26. The method of claim 25, wherein the assist gas is an oxygen/nitrogen mixture containing from 92 to 98% nitrogen.

27. The method as claimed in claim 22, wherein the assist gas is a nitrogen/oxygen mixture having an oxygen content between 150 ppm by volume and 5% by volume, the rest being nitrogen.

28. The method as claimed in claim 22, wherein the optical means is arranged so as to obtain at least one first focusing point positioned near the upper surface of the workpiece to be cut, or in the thickness of the workpiece to be cut in a region close to said upper surface, and at least one second focusing point positioned near the lower surface of the workpiece to be cut and in the thickness of the latter, or beyond the latter.

29. The method as claimed in claim 28, wherein the first focusing point positioned so as to coincide with said upper surface.

30. The method as claimed in claim 22, wherein the thickness of the workpiece to be cut is between 1.5 mm and 5 mm.

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Int. Cl. 2:

B 23 K 26/00

H 03 H 3/04

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BUNDESREPUBLIK DEUTSCHLAND

DEUTSCHES



PATENTAMT

DE 27 13 904 A 1

11

Offenlegungsschrift 27 13 904

21

Aktenzeichen:

P 27 13 904.4-34

22

Anmeldetag:

29. 3. 77

43

Offenlegungstag:

5. 10. 78

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Unionspriorität:

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Bezeichnung:

Verfahren und Vorrichtung zur Herstellung von mittels Laserstrahl erzeugten gratfreien Bohrungen

71

Anmelder:

Siemens AG, 1000 Berlin und 8000 München

72

Erfinder:

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Prüfungsantrag gem. § 28b PatG ist gestellt

DE 27 13 904 A 1

Patentansprüche

1. Verfahren zur Herstellung von mittels Laserstrahlung erzeugten gratfreien Bohrungen, gemäß dem man den Bohrgrat in an sich bekannter Weise durch Defokussierung des Laserstrahles aufschmelzt und einschußseitig mit dem Material des Werkstückes verschweißt, d a d u r c h g e k e n n z e i c h n e t , daß man schon während des Bohrvorganges den sich laufend bildenden Bohrgrat (22) durch Anwendung eines weiteren, den Laserbohrstrahl (11) überlagernden und gegenüber diesem defokussierten Schmelzstrahles (13) verschweißt.
2. Vorrichtung zur Ausübung des Verfahrens nach Anspruch 1, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß der Bearbeitungslaserstrahl (3) in einen am Arbeitsort eine hohe Energiedichte aufweisenden Bohrstrahl (11) und einen am Arbeitsort den Bohrstrahl ummantelnden und eine geringere Energiedichte aufweisenden Schmelzstrahl (13) aufgegliedert ist.
3. Vorrichtung nach Anspruch 2, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß der Bearbeitungslaser ein bifokussierendes Mehrlinsen-Objektiv (14) aufweist, das den Laserstrahl (3) in einen energiereichen Bohrstrahl (11) und einen eine geringere Energiedichte als der erstere aufweisenden Schmelzstrahl (13) aufgliedert, wobei die Brennpunkte (P1) des Bohrstrahles (11) und (P2) des Schmelzstrahles (13) auf der optischen Achse (A) gelegen sind.
4. Vorrichtung nach Anspruch 2 und 3, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß die Objektiv-Linse (19) für den Bearbeitungslaser eine Ringlinse (20) und eine planar hierzu angeordnete Kernlinse (21) ist, wobei diese beiden Linsenkörper (20, 21) aus Materialien unterschiedlicher Brechkraft bestehen.
5. Vorrichtung nach Anspruch 2 und 3, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß die Objektiv-Linse (19) eine Fresnel-Linse ist.
6. Vorrichtung nach Anspruch 2 und 3, dadurch gekennzeichnet,

daß das Objektiv (14) eine Ringlinse (20') sowie eine Kernlinse (21') aufweist, die komplanar zueinander angeordnet sind.

7. Vorrichtung nach Anspruch 2 und 3, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß das Laserobjektiv (14) eine ringförmige Objektiv-Linse (20') und eine hierzu komplanar gelegene Linse (25) aufweist, die gegeneinander einstellbar sind und daß diese beiden Linsen nur die Mantelzone des Laserstrahles (3) beeinflussen.
8. Vorrichtung nach Anspruch 2 und 3, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß die Kernlinse (21') bzw. die Zwischenlinse (25) in Richtung der optischen Achse verstell- und einstellbar sind.
9. Vorrichtung nach Anspruch 2, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß sie zwei Bearbeitungslaser (10 und 12) aufweist, und daß die optische Achse (A') des Schmelzstrahles (13) unter einem spitzen Winkel (W) zur optischen Achse (A) des Bohrstrahles (11) gerichtet ist und daß die beiden optischen Achsen (A und A') sich im Brennpunkt P₁ des Bohrstrahles (11) schneiden.

Verfahren und Vorrichtung zur Herstellung von mittels Laserstrahl erzeugten gratfreien Bohrungen

Die Erfindung bezieht sich auf ein Verfahren und eine Vorrichtung zum Herstellen von mittels Laserstrahlung erzeugten gratfreien Bohrungen, gemäß dem man den Bohrgrad in an sich bekannter Weise durch Defokussierung des Laserstrahles aufschmelzt und einschuß-
5 seitig mit dem Material des Werkstückes verschweißt.

Das Bohren und Schneiden von Werkstücken mittels hochenergie- reichen Strahlen, vorzugsweise unter Anwendung von gepulstem Laserlicht, ist bekannt. Beim Bohren entsteht an der Bohrung-
10 kante bzw. dem Bohrkrater ein Grat, der je nach der Art des zu bohrenden oder schneidenden Materials sowie von der Energiedichte des Strahles verschiedene Formen aufweist. So kann z.B. beim Bohren von Stahl der Grat in Form von mit dem Werkstück verbundenen Tropfen aber auch in der Art von Nadeln nur lose
15 mit dem Werkstück verbunden sein. Wird das Werkstück später hohen Beschleunigungskräften ausgesetzt, wie dies z.B. bei zur Frequenzstabilisierung dienenden Stahlbiegeschwingern der Fall ist, so kann es vorkommen, daß Teile des Grates abbrechen und in der benachbarten Umgebung des Werkstückes die Funktion von
20 Vorrichtungen nachteilig beeinflussen; auch wird durch den abgebrochenen Grat die Eigenfrequenz des Stahlbiegeschwingers zum Teil erheblich geändert. Zur Vermeidung dieses Nachteiles wurde im deutschen Patent Nr. 23 55 428 vorgeschlagen, den Bohrgrad in an sich bekannter Weise durch Defokussierung des Laserstrahles
25 aufzuschmelzen und mit der Stirnfläche des Biegeschwingers zu ver-

schweißen.

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- Derartige Stahlbiegeschwinger haben sich gut bewährt. Indessen ist die Herstellungsweise dieses bekannten Stahlbiegeschwingers zeitaufwendig. Nach erfolgtem Abgleichen wird der Bohrgrat durch die Fokussierung des Laser- bzw. Elektronenstrahles niedergeschmolzen und mit der Stirnfläche des Stahlbiegeschwingers verschweißt. Dadurch kann es vorkommen, daß sich die Eigenfrequenz des Stahlbiegeschwingers ändert. Es muß unter Umständen ein erneuter Abgleich vorgenommen werden. Ist der Bohrgrat hinsichtlich seiner Masse vergleichsweise groß, wie dies bei relativ tiefen Einschüssen in die Stirnfläche eines Stahlbiegeschwingers vorkommt, so bedingt dieser Umstand eine längere Einwirkung des defokussierten Bearbeitungsstrahles auf das Werkstück und somit einen höheren Zeitaufwand. Entsprechende Nachteile treten bei allen mittels Laserstrahl erzeugten Bohrungen auf, bei welchen der Bohrgrat in einem späteren Arbeitsgang mit dem Werkstück verschweißt werden soll. Diese Nachteile sollen durch die Erfindung behoben werden. Dies geschieht gemäß dem erfinderischen Verfahren dadurch, daß man schon während des Bohrvorganges den sich laufend bildenden Bohrgrat durch Anwendung eines weiteren, den Laser-Bohrstrahl überlagernden und gegenüber diesem defokussierten Laser-Schmelzstrahles verschweißt.
- 25 Durch diese erfinderische Verfahrensweise wird demnach der sich bildende Bohrgrat schon während seiner Entstehung kontinuierlich mit der dem Laser-Bohrstrahl zugekehrten Fläche des Werkstückes verschweißt. Bei der während des Abgleichens eines Stahlbiegeschwingers laufend erfolgenden Messung seiner Eigenfrequenz und dem Vergleich der Istfrequenz mit einer Sollfrequenz, z.B. gemäß der DT-OS 23 13 574 entfällt somit eine Nachbehandlung bzw. eine erneute Überprüfung der Eigenfrequenz des Stahlbiegeschwingers nach erfolgtem Verschweißen des Bohrgrates mit der Stirnfläche des Stahlbiegeschwingers.
- 35 Zur Ausübung des Verfahrens bedient man sich vorteilhaft eines Bearbeitungslasers, dessen Linsensystem vorzugsweise dessen Objektiv den Bearbeitungslaserstrahl in einen Bohrstrahl und in

5 einen in seiner optischen Achse liegenden und gegenüber dem
ersteren defokussierten Schmelzstrahl aufgliedert. Besonders
vorteilhaft ist es, mit nur einem Bearbeitungslaser zu arbeiten,
wobei man mittels eines Mehrlinsen-Objektives den Laserstrahl in
einen Bohrstrahl und einen eine geringere Energiedichte als der
erstere aufweisenden Schmelzstrahl aufgliedert.

10 Nach einem weiteren Merkmal der Erfindung besitzt das Objektiv
des Bearbeitungslasers ein bifokussierendes Linsensystem zur Er-
zeugung des Bohr- und Schmelzstrahles, deren Brennpunkte in Ab-
stand auf der beiden Strahlen gemeinsamen optischen Achse ge-
legen sind. Möchte man auf ein bifokussierendes Linsensystem ver-
zichten, so kann man auch den Laser-Schmelzstrahl unter einem Spitz-
winkel auf den Bearbeitungsort des Bohrstrahles projizieren.

15 Bei der Befolgung der erfinderischen Lehre ist es mit vergleichs-
weise einfachen Mitteln möglich, den sich beim Bohren mittels
Laserstrahl bildenden Grat schon während seiner Entstehung
niederzuschmelzen bzw. bei einem Stahlbiegeschwinger mit der
20 Stirnfläche des Biegeschwingers zu verschweißen.

Weitere Ausgestaltungen der Erfindung sind aus den Unteransprüchen
ersichtlich.

25 Es zeigen:

Figur 1 eine gemäß dem erfinderischen Verfahren arbeitende Vor-
richtung zum Abgleichen eines Stahlbiegeschwingers,

Figuren 2 bis 5 verschiedene Linsen-Anordnungen des Bearbeitungs-
laser-Objektives zur Erzeugung eines Bohr- und Schmelz-
30 strahles,

Figur 6 zwei Bearbeitungslaser, deren Strahlen unter einem
spitzen Winkel zueinander gerichtet sind.

35 Gemäß Figur 1 werden zum Abgleich eines Stahlbiegeschwingers 1
in seine Stirnfläche 2 mittels eines Laserstrahles 3 Bohrungen
eingeschossen. Der Stahlbiegeschwinger ist bei 4 eingespannt;
er wird mittels eines Elektromagneten 5 über einen Oszillator 6
zu Schwingungen angeregt. Die Eigenfrequenz des Stahlbiege-

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schwingers wird mittels eines Adapters 7 erfaßt und die Meßgröße über einen Verstärker 8 einem Soll-Istwert-Vergleicher 9 zugeführt. Ein den Bohrstrahl 11 erzeugender Bearbeitungslaser 10 arbeitet hier - ebenfalls in an sich bekannter Art - mit einem zweiten Laser 12 zusammen; er erzeugt den Schmelzstrahl 13. Mittels eines Objektives 14 werden die hier in einer gemeinsamen optischen Achse A verlaufenden Laserstrahlen aufgegliedert, derart, daß Brennpunkte P1 und P2 des Bohr- und Schmelzstrahles auseinanderliegen bzw. die mittels des Objektives erzeugten Brennpunkten der beiden Strahlen 11 und 13 unterschiedlich sind. Wird vom Soll-Ist-Vergleicher 9 eine Übereinstimmung zwischen der Soll- und Istfrequenz ermittelt, so wird der Generator 6 sowie die Laser 10 und 12 abgeschaltet. Im vorliegenden Beispiel sind zwei Bearbeitungslaser 10 und 12 vorgesehen, wobei - in diesem Beispiel - der Schmelzstrahl 13 über einen Umlenkspiegel 16 in die optische Achse A des Bohrerstrahles 11 eingeblendet wird. Sofern der den Bohrstrahl 11 erzeugende Bearbeitungslaser energiereich ist, genügt es und ist es vorteilhaft, mit nur einem Bearbeitungslaser zu arbeiten.

Wie in Figur 2 dargestellt, ist der von einem oder zwei Bearbeitungslasern erzeugte Laserstrahl 3 durch ein Linsensystem 14, bestehend im wesentlichen aus einer bikonkaven Streulinse 18 sowie einer Objektiv-Linse 19, in einen Bohrstrahl 11 und einen Schmelzstrahl 13 aufgegliedert. Zu diesem Zweck ist die Objektiv-Linse 19 zweiteilig gebildet; sie besteht aus einer Ringlinse 20 und einer planar hierzu angeordneten Zentrallinse 21. Die Linsenmaterialien dieser Linsen sind unterschiedlich; die Brechkraft der Zentrallinse 21 ist hier größer als jene der Ringlinse 20. Wie ersichtlich, bilden die Ringlinse mit der Zentrallinse eine Linseneinheit, wobei die Krümmungsradien R_1 und R_2 der planar zueinander liegenden Linsen beiden gemeinsam sind. Das Objektiv 14 ist derart angeordnet, daß der hier von der Zentrallinse 21 erzeugte Brennpunkt des Bohrstrahles 11 auf der Stirnfläche 2 des Biegeschwingers 1 gelegen ist. Der von der Ringlinse 20 erzeugte Brennpunkt P2 des Schmelzstrahles 13 besitzt eine größere Brennweite f_2 als die des Bohrstrahles f_1 . Dies hat zur Folge, daß der Schmelzstrahl während des Bohrvorganges bzw.

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während des Abgleichens die Randzone 2 des Bohrloches 15 beaufschlagt und dabei den Bohrgrat 22 aufschmelzt; dadurch verschweißt der Bohrgrat mit der Stirnfläche 2 des Werkstückes 1. Die Streulinse 18 der Objektivlinse 19 ist hier wahlweise in
5 Richtung der Pfeile 23 verstell- und einstellbar. Durch diese Maßnahme kann eine Strahlenaufteilung in Bezug auf die gewünschten Energiedichten des Bohr- und Schmelzstrahles in begrenztem Umfange herbeigeführt werden.

10 Figur 3 zeigt eine andere Ausbildung der Objektivlinse 19 des Linsensystems 14 des Bearbeitungslasers. Hier ist die Objektivlinse 19 einteilig gebildet; das Linzenmaterial ist homogen. Die Objektivlinse ist hier nach Art einer Fresnellinse gebildet, d.h. der Linsenkörper besitzt Flächen unterschiedlicher sphärischer Krümmung, wie dies durch die Radien R3 und R4 angedeutet ist. Die Wirkungsweise dieser Linse entspricht im übrigen jener der Figur 2.

Figur 4 zeigt ein anderes Linsensystem des Objektivs eines Bearbeitungslasers gemäß der Figur 2. Zum Unterschied gegenüber der letztgenannten Ausführungsform ist hier die Zentral- oder Kernlinse 21' getrennt von der Ringlinse 20' und komplanar zu ihr angeordnet, sowie zwischen der in Pfeilrichtung 23 einstellbaren Streulinse 18 und der Ringlinse 20' gelegen; sie ist in
25 Pfeilrichtung 24 einstellbar. Die Brennpunkte P1 und P2 des Bohrstrahles 11 und des Schmelzstrahles 13, aber auch ihre Strahlenquerschnitte, sind so in geeigneter Weise zueinander abstimmbare. Eine derartige Ausführungsform des Objektivs ist daher zu bevorzugen.

30

Figur 5 zeigt eine andere Anordnung des Laserobjektivs eines Bearbeitungslasers. Die Objektivlinse 20' ist ringförmig gebildet, wobei jedoch im Gegensatz zur Figur 4 eine Zwischenlinse 25 dazu dient, im Zusammenwirken mit der Ringlinse 20' den Schmelzstrahl 13 gegenüber dem Bohrstrahl 11 einstellbar
35 zu halten. Dies geschieht durch eine Einstellung der Zwischenlinse 25 in Richtung der Pfeile 26. Wie ersichtlich ist der Schmelzstrahl 13 vom Bohrstrahl 11 ummantelt, wobei der Brenn-

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punkt P1 des Bohrstrahles auch hier in der Bearbeitungsebene E gelegen ist.

5 Die in den Figuren 2 bis 5 gezeigten Linsensysteme sind lediglich schematisch dargestellt, wobei zur besseren Übersicht auf die Darstellung der zur Anwendung kommenden Korrekturlinsen verzichtet wurde.

10 Figur 6 zeigt eine Anordnung zum Bohren von Löchern mittels eines Laserstrahles, nämlich den Bohrstrahl 11, wobei jedoch hier der die optische Achse 27 des Schmelzstrahles 13 unter einem spitzen Winkel W zur optischen Achse A des Bohrstrahles gerichtet ist. Wie ersichtlich dienen auch hier zwei Bearbeitungslaser 10 und 12 zur Erzeugung des Bohr- und Schmelzstrahles. Sind die Laser
15 parallel zu einander angeordnet, - wie dargestellt - so verwendet man vorteilhaft einen Justierspiegel 28 mit einer nachgeordneten Optik 29, welche den Schmelzstrahl 13, den Bohrstrahl 11 überlagernd, auf den Arbeitsort projiziert.

9 Patentansprüche
6 Figuren

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Fig.4

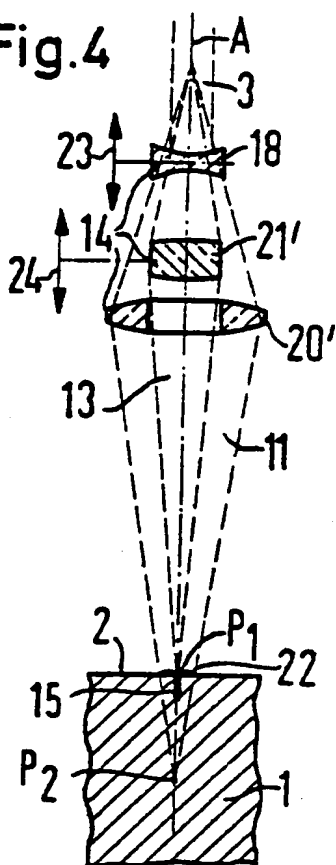


Fig.5

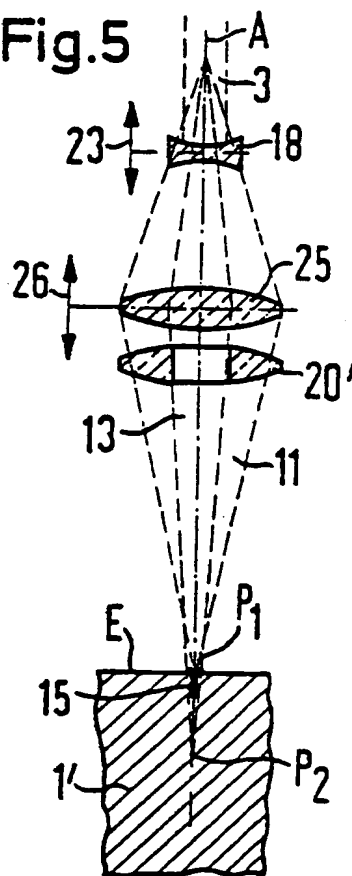
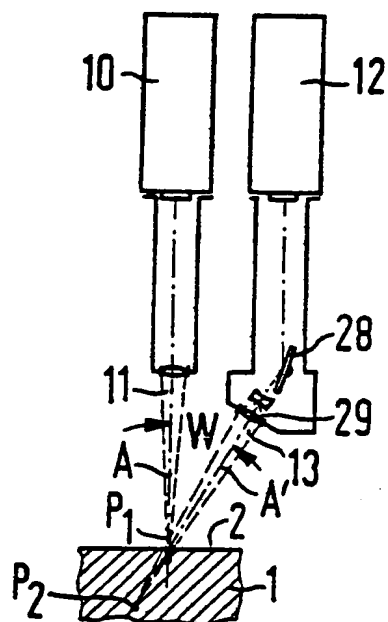


Fig.6



Nummer: 27 13 904
 Int. Cl. 2: B 23 K 28/00
 Anmeldetag: 29. März 1977
 Offenlegungstag: 5. Oktober 1978

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VPA 77 P 7030 BRD

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Fig.1

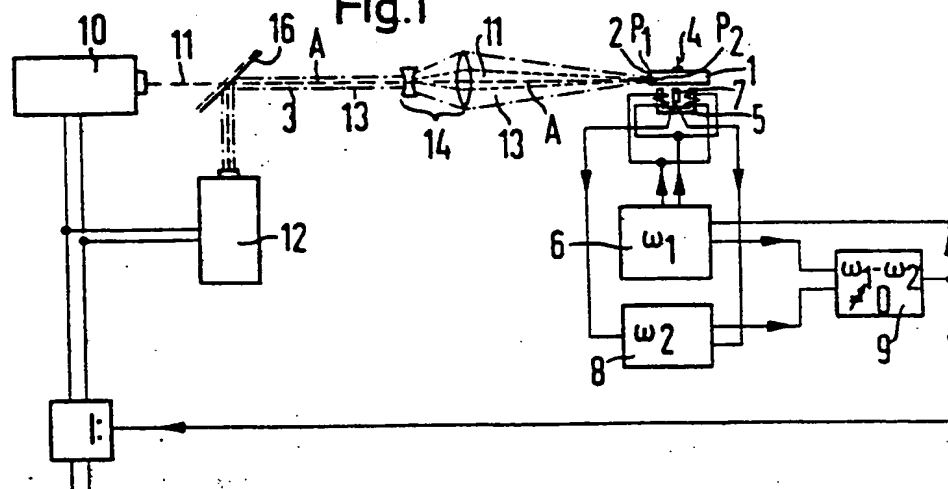


Fig.2

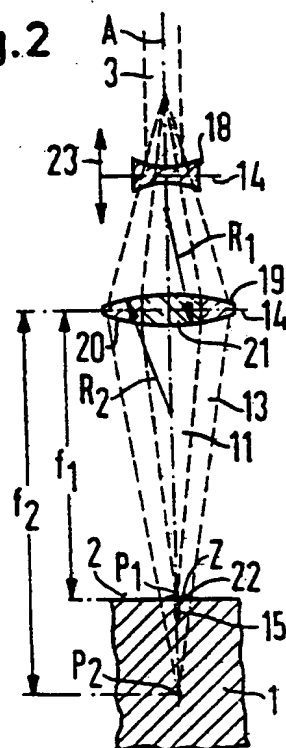
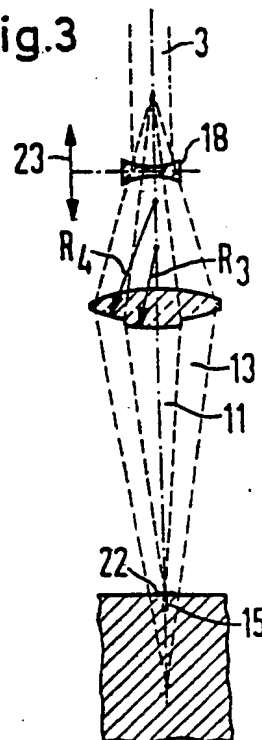


Fig.3



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